

The McAll Mission in France



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PART II

American McAll Association

112 South 16th Street

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The Advance Guard

We call the work of the "Advance Guard" a Mission station in the midst of a neighborhood entirely hostile to all religion, without being called or helped by any co-religionists or any existing group. The aim is always conversion and the saving of souls. But we must be able to approach these souls, and remove the obstacles caused by prejudice, hate or sin. The point of departure is zero. No one wants us; nothing awaits us except the certainty of violent opposition. How can we get to these people whom religion frightens away? We have to adapt our methods to these mentalities, which gives rise to the type of work we call "primary evangelization," and which consists in clearing away underbrush in which thrives a morality, an idealism, and doctrines opposed to Christianity.

Not far from us are often co-religionists, possibly a church whose help we have not yet obtained. Among those who might co-operate with us there are often some who are scared away and even scandalized by this or that type of evangelization; they do not understand that we could not reach these centers alive with politics, by just fighting their opinions. Our duty in establishing a contact, is not to emphasize what separates us but what unites us. What we consider in each one is not the anarchist, the communist, but the man, the brother, the soul like ours which must be saved. It is often in loneliness that our pioneer works, caught between two misunderstandings: that of the proletariat, and the more painful one of his brothers in the faith. The work is thus retarded, it will take years to form these recent converts into real helpers, militant workers.

This isolation of the advance guard explains why it is necessary to organize these recent converts into a family group, to form a popular church, a missionary church, which, in turn will become a means of converting the people.

We will mention three examples of these advance guard stations: at Nantes, or to be more exact at Chantenay, a large working class quarter, a citadel of "leftists," one of our largest Fraternités has been erected. Started in 1897, from the work accomplished in several quarters by the McAll Mission with the help of the local church, this Fraternité began with a dozen adults, earnest Christians, a few of them reformed drunkards. The opening of this work in the midst of a workingmen's neighborhood, roused the fury of the political organizations and of the free-thinkers. Violently opposed to the Roman Church, the whole population was passionately anti-religious. The contact was difficult. At first the police had to maintain order; the

mention of the name of Jesus aroused laughter and hooting! We managed to draw large audiences by holding debates, and we suffered the assaults of anarchy, of socialism and free thought, of the Catholic party, and later of communism. We took part in the debates of various political organizations, where there was always an anti-religious note to be heard. Our one aim was to show before these crowds the true historic figure of the evangelical Jesus.

The revelation of Jesus! We might thus sum up this long but enthusiastic primary evangelization. Once more we were able to prove the respect that our Christ arouses in the most violent. After a few years of effort it became possible to present the name of Jesus to great crowds: we had been able to establish the difference between clericalism and religion, and get the Socialist paper to cease printing anti-religious articles. When, after the war, we were invited to the first meeting organized by a budding communism, under the motto "Against God and our Fatherland," we were much touched to be listened to quietly by a crowd of workingmen, and to be able to bear witness to our faith, to our Christ, and to be applauded at the close. It goes without saying that all this time the work has gone deep into many souls. The work of spiritual upbuilding has gone on among the ever growing nucleus of the faithful ones, by means of the various activities in the *Fraternité*: Bible studies, prayer meetings, etc. In 1915 the Communion Service was established, and in 1927 a missionary church was started with a membership of 129 active members, and numerous young people. Since then the work has progressed encouragingly; we do not have to fight our adversaries any more, but the Adversary remains, and the struggle continues for the salvation of souls.

ST. NAZAIRE

The *Fraternité* at St. Nazaire is the younger sister of the one at Nantes. Let us say at once that we have great hopes of it. For a long time the McAll Mission has worked in this city which is a center of Socialism and where free thought is rampant. In 1888, the Mission was called there by the church at Nantes. It was not only to evangelize but to take charge of the little church which was a branch of the one at Nantes. This co-operation lasted until 1911, when the church was handed over to the *Société Centrale Evangelique*, the Mission giving all its time to evangelization, and its converts were taken into the Reformed Church parish.

A *Fraternité* was founded and once more this form of evangelization has proved a success. This work benefited by the reputation it had acquired among the working class of the region at the *Fraternité* of

Nantes. It grew rapidly and has its recognized place among the important organizations of the city, so that Protestantism enjoys complete freedom and consideration. In 1930, after an agreement with the S.C.E. and the church at Nantes, the whole region of St. Nazaire was given over to the Mission, which now has the care of the church along with its evangelization program. During the years from 1930 to 1936, this parish has seen its membership grow from 107 to 317, thanks to the converts brought in by the Fraternité.

The work is far from being easy standing as it does between a hostile Catholic church solidly organized, and lay organizations of free thinkers, which are militant and well supported by public officials.

Here, too, if one wants to keep contacts with the populace, and not be confined to just a small circle of friends one must deliberately enter into the life of the city, take part in public manifestations, face crowds in debates, uncover the face of Christ which has been veiled by ignorance or a fixed opinion.

Here the Social Study group helps in this primary evangelization, having cleared away prejudices and errors, makes the teaching of Christ appear in all its truth. "I am happy to have come here to-night" said a militant communist, "I know now that without being a traitor to my class I can be a believer." The centers of public education also show themselves well disposed towards us. M. LeBerre is much encouraged in his double task of pastor and evangelist. His sorrow is great that for lack of means and sufficient assistance he cannot respond to all the calls and go through all the doors that are open to the Gospel.

ARCUEIL

A Red neighborhood, entirely RED! Nine years ago by an act of faith caused by a desire to go to the Godless, this Fraternité was opened. Some have been hostile: those who feel it is a power in the service of God, the God it is necessary to free men from in order to open to them the road of progress; some have held us in contempt, because they considered our message "an old song" without efficiency! Marxist materialism is a reality, and man is an animal that cares little for the spirit.

The contact was first made with the children by a day nursery, during the long vacation; with the parents, at the time of the exhibition of the work done by their children. Then followed interminable and passionate discussions in the circle for Social Studies, and later in the circle for the study of religion.

The respect and brotherly affection shown us by even our worst adversaries have caused a good many families to feel that the Frater-

nit  is a meeting place, where one feels at home and entirely free. The disinterested character of the work shown by its years of service rendered has contributed to the conciliation of many people; but it is always in an atmosphere of struggle and contradiction that the work is carried on in this center, which is always excited by political waves. Here is what the Director M. R. LeGoff writes us: "In spite of all the efforts of those who are opposing us, the work is going forward. The Gospel of the Saviour is going into the homes. Slowly perhaps—but one must learn to be patient—souls are awakening to the life of the spirit, and proclaiming their loyalty to the Crucified."

EMMANUEL CHASTAND.



Afternoon tea at Maison Verte for members of the Mission's young people's societies of the Paris area.

The McAll Mission and Young People

What particularly strikes the visitor to the stations of the McAll Mission is the number of young people in attendance. Children, young men and young women find there attractive and varied interests. The means of activity have been multiplied in order to draw the young people as much as possible from worldly influences, and keep them in contact with Christian surroundings. Some of our centers thus succeed in having 75 to 90 hours a month attendance.

Everything is planned to this end.

The Guardian School which welcomes the pupils as they come out of Day School, looks after their home lessons.

The Thursday and Sunday Schools, the Christian Association for Juniors and Seniors; the Scouts, who lend themselves so well to the formation of character and work among the Cubs, the Little Wings, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, and the Roadsters—(Senior Scouts). Let us recall here that the first troop of Scouts started in France was

organized by our former worker Pastor Gallienne, at Grenelle, and the second troop of Girl Scouts saw the light at the Maison Verte. Sport Organizations; and finally Dispensaries to watch over the health of our children.

Add to these the hours of recreation at the Vacation Colonies and Schools, of which we shall speak later, and you will see what a heavy but beautiful task our Missionaries have. All these efforts tend to one aim: to bring each one of these young people to the Saviour.

Where do these children come from? From workingmen's Centers where religious life has little place, when anti-religion is not openly practiced. Our children are, most of them, very ignorant. To many the name of Jesus is unknown. "Who's that guy?" exclaimed one small boy on hearing the Saviour's name. Others are warned against Him: "My father tells me it's humbug!" Some of their little hearts are already turned against all religion, "Where is your God, that I may stone him to death" said a little chap of five.

Many, also, are already morally warped, and sin has tarnished both body and soul. We receive at times deplorable examples of this. One little girl of ten, has to live with her mother and two older sisters, who receive transient guests. One little boy, a witness to his mother's carousals, declared: "I, when I grow up shall kill the men!" Above all, Alcoholism which changes homes into a hell. One child cries at the thought of going home; a little boy declares if he was dead he would not see his father beat his mother any more. Poor youngsters, who enter life initiated to the evil, and already victims of the sins of their elders! It is easy to understand that our stations are to them oases, the joy of their lives. Again, poor youngsters, for having realized the Christian ideal they can see how low their people have fallen. To their moral suffering is sometimes added physical suffering: parents, embarrassed by these purified spirits and feeling themselves judged by them, become violent in trying to drag their children down to their own level. They forbid their going back to the Mission, throw the Bible in the fire, and even illtreat them!

And yet numerous victories are won under God over these young people who refuse to be lost. A multitude of examples could be cited, had we the space, in corroboration of our statements.

The religious influence on the young people is marked by the growing number of catechumens which have come out of our Scout and Christian Association groups. We will give a few examples of these young people who have been won by Jesus.

A Girl Scout who was converted, found herself for health reasons far from all religious help. She writes: "I would give a great deal to

attend a service. To think that some who will go to the Temple on Sunday will be bored! How I would like to be in their place to quench my thirst. Many feel it is quite natural to come and hear a talk about God, they do not realize their great privilege. But am I too not privileged to be able to read the Word of God every night? There are so many pagans who would like to know Him! My most ardent wish is to be able to work for Him in a Mission."

A number of the workers in the Mission came to us quite young and gave themselves to Him who saved them. Actually, seven of these young people whose families have been brought to the Gospel, are preparing to become workers for God.

And we would like also to speak of the many young Christian homes which started in our Fraternité. All these young people are our joy and crown and we bless God that we were called to serve them.